Bruce Jackson & Diane Christian video introduction to this week's film

Click here to find the film online. (UB students received instructions how to view the film through UB's library services.)

DIRECTOR Martin Scorsese
WRITING Paul D. Zimmerman
PRODUCER Arnon Milchan
CINEMATOGRAPHER Fred Schuler
EDITOR Thelma Schoonmaker
MUSIC Robbie Robertson

The film was nominated for the Palme d'Or at the 1983 Cannes Film Festival. Scorcese, Zimmerman, De Niro, Schoonmaker and Lewis all received Oscar nominations.

CAST
Robert De Niro...Rupert Pupkin
Jerry Lewis...Jerry Langford
Sandra Bernhard...Masha
Diahnne Abbott...Rita Keene
Shelley Hack...Cathy Long
Margo Winkler...a receptionist of Langford's production company
Kim Chan...Jonno
Frederick De Cordova...Bert Thomas
Edgar Scherick...Wilson Crockett
Ed Herlihy...himself
Tony Randall...himself
Victor Borge...himself
Joyce Brothers...herself
Catherine Scorsese...Rupert's Mom (only voice)

Cathy Scorsese...Dolores, a fan of Pupkin in one of his daydreams.
Martin Scorsese...TV director
Charles Scorsese...first Man at Bar

MARTIN SCORSESE (b. November 17, 1942 in Queens, New York City, New York) is distinct among American filmmakers in that he is also a film scholar. He has been involved in film preservation efforts, made films about film history, and he has taught film history (one of his notable former students at NYU is Spike Lee). He has frequently made documentaries about various topics: *Italianamerican* (1974), about his parents; *The Last Waltz* (1978), documenting the 1970s rock outfit The Band's farewell concert, including a performance by Bob Dylan that the 2016 Nobel Laureate requested Scorsese not to shoot; years after going against Dylan's wishes, he was recruited

to direct and produce *No Direction Home: Bob Dylan** for PBS's *American Masters* series in 2005, and the genre-bending 2019 documentary *Rolling Thunder Revue: A Bob Dylan Story by Martin Scorsese*; he also directed and produced *The 50 Year Argument* (2014),* about the *New York Review of Books*. A recurring theme in many of his films is the human capacity for violence. He made the definitive film about the lone wolf bent on acting out on his rage in the 1976 film *Taxi Driver*, for which he won the elite Palme d'Or at Cannes that year. He had been nominated for the same award in 1974 for *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (1974). He examined the intersection of violence and rage as sport and in the domestic sphere in 1980's *Raging Bull*, for which he was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Director in 1981. In 1983, he was once again nominated at Cannes for the Palm d'Or for *The King of Comedy* (1982). In 1986, he won Best Director and was nominated for the Palm d'Or for *After Hours* (1985) at Cannes. His eye for violence (and perhaps his early intention to become a priest) has also been directed at religious themes. In 1989, he was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Director for *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), an adaptation of Nikos Kazantzakis's 1955 novel. In 2016, Scorsese returned to religious themes, exploring colonial cruelty intersecting with the aims of seventeenth-century Jesuit missionaries in *Silence*.*** In 1990, he turned his critique of violence onto organized crime and its theater of cruelty in *Goodfellas*,** for which he was nominated for Academy Awards for Best Director and for Best Writing, Screenplay Based on Material from Another Medium in 1991. He also has a flair for a sober American nostalgia, adapting Edith Wharton's 1920 novel *The Age of Innocence* (1993),** for which he was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Writing, Screenplay Based on Material Previously Produced or Published in 1994. In 2002, his interest in violence, crime, and American nostalgia led to an examination of Irish immigrant life in *Gangs of New York*, for which he was, again nominated for an Academy Award for Best Director in 2003. While in the 1970s to the 1990s, he was known to frequently make use of Robert De Niro, making some of his most iconic work, in the 2000s and 2010s, he has frequently made use of actor Leonardo DiCaprio: in the *The Aviator* (2004),* a film that turned the sober nostalgic gaze to the early Hollywood studio system of film production and a film for which Scorsese was nominated in 2005 for an Academy Award for Best Achievement in Directing, *The Departed* (2006),* *Shutter Island* (2010),* and *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013).* He *finally* won his long-awaited Academy Award for Best Achievement in Directing in 2007 for *The Departed*. In 2012, he was nominated for Academy Awards for Best Achievement in Directing and for Best Motion Picture of the Year for *Hugo* (2011), and he was nominated in 2014 for Academy Awards for Best Achievement in Directing and for Best Motion Picture of the Year for *Wolf of Wall Street*. His penchant for sober nostalgia has also perhaps guided his forays into television production: producing and directing for television series documenting the rise of corrupt American institutions, such as the rise of Atlantic City as a casino district in *Boardwalk Empire* (2010)* and, more recently, the 1970s recording industry in *Vinyl* (2016).* This year (2018), he won the Carosse d'Or at Cannes, an award honoring a lifetime of distinguished filmmaking recognized "for the innovative qualities of his films, for his audacity and independence" (*pour les qualités novatrices de ses films, pour son audace et son indépendance*). His 2019 film, *The Irishman*,* was nominated for ten Oscars, this year. Here are some of the other films he has directed: *Vesuvius VI* (1959 Short),* *It's Not Just You, Murray!* (1964 Short),** *Who's That Knocking at My Door* (1967),** *Boxcar Bertha* (1972), *Mean Streets* (1973),** *New York, New York* (1977), *The Color of Money* (1986), *Michael Jackson: Bad* (1987 Video short), *Cape Fear* (1991), *Casino* (1995),** *A Personal Journey with Martin Scorsese Through American Movies* (1995 TV Movie documentary),*** *Kundun* (1997), *Bringing*

Out the Dead (1999), *The Blues* (2003 TV Series documentary),* *The Key to Reserva* (2007 Short), *Shine a Light* (2008 Documentary), *George Harrison: Living in the Material World* (2011 Documentary),* and upcoming projects: *Roosevelt* (announced),* *The Devil in the White City* (TV Series, announced),* *Killers of the Flower Moon* (2021, filming), and *An Afternoon with SCTV* (TV Special, post-production). He has produced and excecutive-produced 76 films, written for 17 films, and has acted in 34 films and television series.

***Producer**
****Writer**
*****Producer and writer**

FRED SCHULER (b. March 15, 1940 in Munich, Germany) has done cinematography for 30 films. He was very active in American comedy cinema in the 1980s, then reemerged in the mid-1990s as primarily working in German cinema. These are some films he worked on: *Love in the Hamptons* (1976), *Gloria* (1980), *Stir Crazy* (1980), *Arthur* (1981), *The King of Comedy* (1982), *Easy Money* (1983), *Amityville 3-D* (1983), *The Woman in Red* (1984), *Nothing Lasts Forever* (1984), *Fletch* (1985), *Maxie* (1985), *Wise Guys* (1986), *Haunted Honeymoon* (1986), *Armed and Dangerous* (1986), *The Deathmaker* (1995), *Manila* (2000), *Just the Beginning* (2000), and *Hamburger Lektionen* (Documentary, 2006).

THELMA SCHOONMAKER (January 3, 1940 in Algeria) began her film career editing Mary Ellen Bute's (a largely forgotten filmmaker known in the 1930s to 1950s for abstract musical shorts) screen adaptation of Mary Manning Howe's dramatization of James Joyce's impenetrable final tome *Finnegans Wake*. Bute's film that Schoonmaker edited *Passages from James Joyce's Finnegans Wake* was screened at Cannes in 1965, taking home Best Debut of the Year. In 1970, while editing Michael Wadleigh's documentary of the epochal 1969 Woodstock festival, she was also a second-unit director with Martin Scorsese. Her work on *Woodstock* earned her first Academy Award nomination for Best Film Editing in 1971. She has first worked on one of Scorsese's own projects in his 1970 documentary *Street Scenes** and then became a consistent editor for his films starting with *Raging Bull* (1980).* She won her first Academy Award for Best Film Editing for her work on *Raging Bull* in 1981. She was nominated for Academy Awards for Best Film Editing in 1991 for *Goodfellas* (1990)* and in 2003 for *Gangs of New York* (2002).* She took home Academy Awards for Best Achievement in Film Editing in 2005 for *The Aviator* (2004)* and in 2007 for *The Departed* (2006).* She was, once again, nominated for Best Achievement in Film Editing in 2012 for her work on *Hugo* (2011).* She has 38 editing credits. These are some of the other projects she has edited: *Who's That Knocking at My Door* (1967), *The King of Comedy* (1982),* *After Hours* (1985),* *The Color of Money* (1986),* *Michael Jackson: Bad* (1987 Video short),* *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988),* *Cape Fear* (1991),* *The Age of Innocence* (1993),* *Casino* (1995),* *Kundun* (1997),* *My Voyage to Italy* (1999 Documentary),* *Bringing Out the Dead* (1999),* *The Aviator* (2004),* *Shutter Island* (2010),* *Hugo* (2011),* *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013),* *Silence* (2016),* and *The Snowman* (2017),** *The Irishman* (2019),* and *Killers of the Flower Moon* (filming).*

***Directed by Martin Scorsese**
****Produced by Martin Scorsese**

ROBBIE ROBERTSON (July 5, 1943 (age 76), Toronto, Ontario) is best known for his work as lead guitarist and primary songwriter for The Band, and for his career as a solo recording artist. Robertson's work with the Band was instrumental in creating the Americana music genre. Robertson has been inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and the Canadian Music Hall of Fame as a member of the Band, and has been inducted to Canada's Walk of Fame, both with the Band and on his own. As a film soundtrack producer and composer, Robertson is known for his collaborations with director Martin Scorsese, which began with the rockumentary film *The Last Waltz* (1978), and continued through a number of dramatic films, including *Raging Bull* (1980), *Casino* (1995), *The Departed* (2006), *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013)

and *The Irishman* (2019). He has worked on many other soundtracks for film and television. He has also produced, been consulted for, or composed original material for soundtracks for these films among many others: *Carny* (1980), *The King of Comedy* (1982), *The Color of Money* (1986), *Phenomenon* (1996), *Any Given Sunday* (1999), *Gangs of New York* (2002), *Shutter Island* (2010), and *Silence* (2016).

ROBERT DE NIRO (August 17, 1943 in New York City, New York) is an American actor (116 credits), producer (35 credits), and director. He has won Oscars for Best Actor in a Leading Role twice for *The Godfather: Part II* (1974) and *Raging Bull* (1980). De Niro's first major film roles were in the sports drama Bang the Drum Slowly (1973) and Scorsese's crime film *Mean Streets* (1973). He earned Academy Award nominations for the psychological thrillers *Taxi Driver* (1976) and *Cape Fear* (1991), both directed by Scorsese. De Niro received additional nominations for Michael Cimino's Vietnam war drama *The Deer Hunter* (1978), Penny Marshall's drama *Awakenings* (1990), and David O. Russell's romantic comedy-drama *Silver Linings Playbook* (2012). These are some of his other films: *Three Rooms in Manhatt*an (1965), *Young Wolves* (1968), *Greetings* (1968), *The Wedding Party* (1969), *Bloody Mama* (1970), *Hi, Mom!* (1970), *Jennifer on My Mind* (1971), *Born to Win* (1971), *The Gang That Couldn't Shoot Straight* (1971), *Bang the Drum Slowly* (1973), *1900* (1976), *The Last Tycoon* (1976), *New York, New York* (1977), *True Confessions* (1981), *The King of Comedy* (1982), *Once Upon a Time in America* (1984), *Brazil* (1985), *The Mission* (1986), *Angel Heart* (1987), *The Untouchables* (1987), *Midnight Run* (1988), *Jacknife* (1989), *We're No Angels* (1989), *Stanley & Iris* (1990), *Goodfellas* (1990), *Backdraft* (1991), *Night and the City* (1992), *Mad Dog and Glory* (1993), *This Boy's Life* (1993), *A Bronx Tale** (1993), *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994), *One Hundred and One Nights* (1995), *Casino* (1995), *Heat* (1995), *The Fan* (1996), *Sleepers* (1996), *Marvin's Room* (1996), *Cop Land* (1997), *Jackie Brown* (1997), *Wag the Dog* (1997), *Ronin* (1998), *Analyze This* (1999), *Men of Honor* (2000), *Meet the Parents* (2000), *The Score* (2001), *Showtime* (2002), *Analyze That* (2002), *Godsend* (2004), *Shark Tale* (2004), *Meet the Fockers* (2004), *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (2004), *The Good Shepherd** (2006), *Little Fockers* (2010), *Killer Elite* (2011), *Last Vegas* (2013), *American Hustle* (2013), *The Comedian* (2016), and *Untitled De Niro/Ramirez/Jakubowicz Project* (announced).
***Also directed**

JERRY LEWIS (b. March 16, 1926, Newark, New Jersey—d. August 20, 2017 (aged 91)
Las Vegas, Nevada) was an American comedian, actor (74 credits), and filmmaker, dubbed "The King of Comedy" and "The Total Filmmaker". He gained his career breakthrough together with singer Dean Martin, becoming Martin & Lewis in 1946 and for ten years, would both perform on stage and in film and television until their acrimonious breakup in 1956. Martin and Lewis starred in movies, such as *At War with the Army* (1950), *That's My Boy* (1951), *Sailor Beware* (1952), *Jumping Jacks* (1952), *The Stooge* (1952), *Scared Stiff* (1953), *The Caddy* (1953), *Money from Home* (1953), *Living It Up* (1954), 3 Ring Circus (1954), *You're Never Too Young* (1955), *Artists and Models* (1955), *Pardner*s (1956) and *Hollywood or Bust* (1956), all produced by Hal B. Wallis. After the breakup, Lewis would remain at Paramount, working with Wallis; his first solo movie was *The Delicate Delinquent* (1957), which he produced as well. After

starring in *The Sad Sack* (1957), Lewis made *Rock-A-Bye Baby* (1958) and *The Geisha Boy* (1958), and *Don't Give Up The Ship* (1959). In 1960, he finished his contract with Wallis with *Visit to a Small Planet* (1960) and wrapped up production on his own film *Cinderfella* (1960), and he made his debut as film director of and starred in *The Bellboy* (1960). Lewis would follow that film by directing several more films he co-wrote with Bill Richmond, including *The Ladies Man* (1961). Throughout the 1960s, he directed and starred in many comedy hits, including *The Nutty Professor* (1963), *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World* (1963), and *The Disorderly Orderly* (1964). In the early 1970s, he took on an ambitious but failed project that led to his disappearance from film for nearly a decade. *The Day the Clown Cried* (1972), a drama set in a Nazi concentration camp, which he starred in and directed was rarely discussed by Lewis, but he said that litigation over post-production finances and copyright prevented the film's completion and theatrical release. Lewis returned to the big screen and directed and starred in *Hardly Working* (1981), after an 11-year absence from film; despite being panned by critics, it eventually earned $50 million. In 1983, Lewis co-starred in Martin Scorsese's film *The King of Comedy*, as a late-night TV host, plagued by two obsessive fans, played by Robert De Niro and Sandra Bernhard. He received wide critical acclaim and a BAFTA nomination for this serious dramatic role. He continued to appear in films throughout the next three decades, including *Fight For Life* (1987), *Cookie 0*(1989), *Mr. Saturday Night* (1992), and *The Nutty Professor* (2008). His final film roles were in 2016's *The Trust* and *Max Rose*. Throughout his career, he was on many notable television shows, including: *The Andy Williams Show* (1965), *The Red Skelton Show* (1970), *The Carol Burnett Show* (1971), *The Dick Cavett Show* (1973), *Saturday Night Live* (1983), *Mad About You* (1993), *The Simpsons* (2003), *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* (2006), and *Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee* (2018).

SANDRA BERNHARD (b. June 6, 1955 (age 64), Flint, Michigan) first gained attention in the late 1970s, with her stand-up comedy in which she often bitterly critiqued celebrity culture and political figures. As her popularity as a comedian grew she was cast as a supporting player on *The Richard Pryor Show* in 1977. Guest appearances on evening talk shows followed. Her big break came in 1983 when she was cast by Martin Scorsese to star as stalker and kidnapper Masha in the film *The King of Comedy* for which she won the National Society of Film Critics Award for Best Supporting Actress. Bernhard was also a frequent guest on David Letterman's NBC program *Late Night with David Letterman*, making 28 appearances starting in 1983. In 1991, Bernhard began playing the role of Nancy Bartlett on the hit sitcom *Roseanne*. She appeared in 33 episodes between 1991 and 1997, and was one of the first actresses to portray an openly bisexual recurring character on American television. Bernhard continued acting in mostly independent films and TV guest roles and forays into mainstream films such as the widely panned cult film *Hudson Hawk* (1991) and *Dallas Doll* (1994). She has appeared in many iconic television series, including *The Sopranos* (2000) and *Will & Grace* (2001). More recently, she has had recurring television roles on *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* (2014-2015), *Difficult People* (2016), *Pose* (2018-present), and *American Horror Story* (2018).

DIAHNNE ABBOTT (b. January 1, 1945 (age 75), New York City, New York) is a 1970s and 1980s film and television actress (14 credits) who first portrayed the pornographic movie theatre box office clerk in Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976) opposite Robert De Niro. She also played the object of De Niro's affections in Scorsese's 1983 film, *The King of Comedy* and, in real life, was also married to De Niro

from 1976 to 1988. She has a cameo in the 1977 Scorsese film *New York, New York*, in which she sings Fats Waller's song, "Honeysuckle Rose." She was also in John Cassavetes's 1984 *Love Streams* and Richard Pryor's 1986 autobiographical film *Jo Jo Dancer, Your Life Is Calling*.

SHELLEY HACK (b. July 6, 1947 (age 72),

Greenwich, Connecticut) has acted in 33 films and television series. She is, perhaps, best remembered as the face of Revlon's Charlie perfume from the mid-1970s until the early 1980s and for her role as Tiffany Welles in the fourth season of *Charlie's Angels* (1979–80). Her feature film debut was a bit part in *Annie Hall* (1977). She starred with Annette O'Toole and Meredith Baxter Birney in the critically acclaimed *Vanities* (1981), a television production of a play about three Texas cheerleaders, part of HBO's *Standing Room Only* series. She received positive reviews for her supporting part in Martin Scorsese's *The King of Comedy* (1983). She had a well-received leading role in the cult horror film *The Stepfather* and was a regular on two short-lived TV series of the 1980s: *Cutter to Houston* (1983) and *Jack and Mike* (1986–87). She had several more notable guest appearances in film and television up until 1997, when she retired from acting.

ED HERLIHY (b. August 14, 1909, Boston, Massachusetts—d. January 30, 1999 (aged 89) New York City) got his start as an announcer for many radio shows from the 1930s to the 1950s. In the 1940s, he narrated for Universal Newsreels, describing WWII, the death of President Roosevelt, the execution of Italian dictator Benito Mussolini and the detonation of the first atomic bombs. In the next decade, during the Cold War, he narrated the very first American newsreel on the launch of Sputnik. Moving into the new medium of television in the 1950s, his early television credits included Sid Caesar's *Your Show of Shows*, which also famously launched Mel Brooks and Woody Allen's careers, and soap operas *As the World Turns* and *All My Children*. Allen would make use of Herlihy's vocal talents for several films in the 1980s, including *Hannah and Her Sisters*, *Radio Days*, and *Zelig*. These talents were also called on for Spike Lee's *Malcolm X* (1992) and Tim Burton's *Pee-wee's Big Adventure* (1985).

TONY RANDALL (b. February 26, 1920, Tulsa, Oklahoma—d. May 17, 2004 (aged 84), New York City, New York) got his start on Broadway, moving into television as a history teacher, Harvey Weskit, on *Mister Peepers* (1952–1955). In the 1950s, he continued to guest star on other shows such as *The Gulf Playhouse*, *The Pepsi-Cola Playhouse*, and the *Kraft Theatre*. Randall's 1955 success in his first major Broadway role in *Inherit the Wind* led to film offers and his first significant big-screen role in *Oh, Men! Oh, Women!* (1957). It was made at 20th Century Fox who promoted Randall to stardom with *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?* (1957) alongside Jayne Mansfield. He had one of the leads in *No Down Payment* (1957). Randall co-starred with Debbie Reynolds in *The Mating Game* (1959) at MGM. He was in a huge hit with *Pillow Talk* (1959) supporting Doris Day and Rock Hudson; he would reunite with Day and Hudson for two more films. He then starred in an NBC-TV special *The Secret of Freedom* (1959), and on TV he was also in *The Man in the Moon* (1960) co-written by Mel Brooks. Randall was top billed in MGM's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1960), then had a Pillow Talk style support role in *Let's Make Love* (1960) with Marilyn Monroe and Yves Montand and *Lover Come Back* (1961) with Hudson and Day. In 1961 Randall played a highly dramatic role in "Hangover," an episode of *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour* in which he portrayed an alcoholic business executive who strangles his wife in a drunken rage. Randall starred as nearly all of the leading characters in the 1964 classic film *7 Faces of Dr. Lao*. He had the lead in *The Brass Bottle* (1964) and made one last film with Hudson and Day, *Send Me No Flowers* (1965). Randall had the lead in *Fluffy* (1965), a comedy about a lion; *The Alphabet Murders* (1965), playing Hercule Poirot for Frank Tashlin; *Our*

Man in Marrakesh (1966), as a secret agent; and *Hello Down There* (1969). Randall returned to television in 1970 as Felix Unger in the television adaptation of *The Odd Couple*, opposite Jack Klugman, a role lasting for five years. By the time Martin Scorsese was making *The King of Comedy* in 1983, Randall was a household name in television comedy, making frequent guest appearances on talk shows and game shows, so he was cast as himself. Later film roles included the gag spoof of erotic thrillers *Fatal Instinct* (1994) and *Down with Love* (2003).

VICTOR BORGE (b. 3 January 1909, Copenhagen, Denmark—d. 23 December 2000 (aged 91) Greenwich, Connecticut, U.S.) was a Danish comedian, conductor, and pianist who achieved great popularity in radio and television in the United States and Europe. His blend of music and comedy earned him the nicknames "The Clown Prince of Denmark," "The Unmelancholy Dane," and "The Great Dane." He gave his first piano recital when he was eight years old, and in 1918 was awarded a full scholarship at the Royal Danish Academy of Music, studying under Olivo Krause. Later on, he was taught by Victor Schiøler, Liszt's student Frederic Lamond, and Busoni's pupil Egon Petri. Borge played his first major concert in 1926 at the Danish Odd Fellow Palæet (The Odd Fellow's Lodge building) concert hall. After a few years as a classical concert pianist, he started his now famous "stand-up" act, with the signature blend of piano music and jokes. He married the American Elsie Chilton in 1933; the same year he debuted with his revue acts. Borge started touring extensively in Europe, where he began telling anti-Nazi jokes. When the German armed forces occupied Denmark in 1940, Borge was playing a concert in Sweden and managed to escape to Finland. He travelled to America on the United States Army transport American Legion, the last neutral ship to make it out of Petsamo, Finland, and arrived in August 1940, with only $20, with $3 going to the customs fee. Even though Borge did not speak a word of English upon arrival, he quickly managed to adapt his jokes to the American audience, learning English by watching movies. He took the name of Victor Borge, and in 1941, he started on Rudy Vallee's radio show. He was hired soon after by Bing Crosby for his *Kraft Music Hall* programme. Borge quickly rose to fame, winning Best New Radio Performer of the Year in 1942. Soon after the award, he was offered film roles with stars such as Frank Sinatra (in *Higher and Higher*). While hosting *The Victor Borge Show* on NBC beginning in 1946, he developed many of his trademarks, including repeatedly announcing his intent to play a piece but getting "distracted" by something or other, making comments about the audience, or discussing the usefulness of Chopin's "Minute Waltz" as an egg timer. He would also start out with some well-known classical piece like Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" and suddenly move into a harmonically similar pop or jazz tune, such as Cole Porter's "Night and Day" or "Happy Birthday to You." On television, Borge appeared on *Toast of the Town* hosted by Ed Sullivan several times during 1948. He became a naturalized citizen of the United States the same year. His later television appearances included his "Phonetic Punctuation" routine on *The Electric Company* in a filmed sketch. In addition, he appeared several times on *Sesame Street*, and he was a guest star during the fourth season of *The Muppet Show*. He would appear as himself in 1982's *The King of Comedy* and throughout the rest of his life he would continue to give live comedy performances.

JOYCE BROTHERS (b. October 20, 1927, Brooklyn, New York—d. May 13, 2013 (aged 85) Fort Lee, New Jersey) was an American psychologist, television personality, and columnist. She first became famous in 1955 for winning the top prize on the American game show *The $64,000 Question*, the only woman to do so. Her fame from the game show allowed her to go on to host various advice columns and television shows, which established her as a pioneer in the field of "pop (popular) psychology." She is often credited as the first to normalize psychological concepts to the American mainstream. Her syndicated columns were featured in newspapers and magazines, including a monthly column for *Good Housekeeping*, in which she contributed for nearly 40 years. As Brothers quickly became the "face of

psychology" for American audiences, she often appeared in various television roles, usually as herself. From the 1970s onward, she also began to accept fictional roles that parodied her "woman psychologist" persona. Brothers appeared on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson* as a means for the public to get to know her more than the advice columns. With more than ninety appearances on the show, she provided detailed psychological updates on the accounts of the current social climate of that time. She also appeared on daytime television programs like *Good Morning America*, *Today*, *Entertainment Tonight*, and *CNN* as well as late-night television shows with Merv Griffin, Mike Douglas, and Conan O'Brien, amongst many others, including *The Steve Allen Show* and *The Dick Cavett Show*. As a comedy television talk personality, she was naturally cast as herself in *The King of Comedy* (1983).

"Martin Scorsese," from *American Film Directors* V. II. Ed. John Wideman, H. H. Wilson Co., NY, 1988

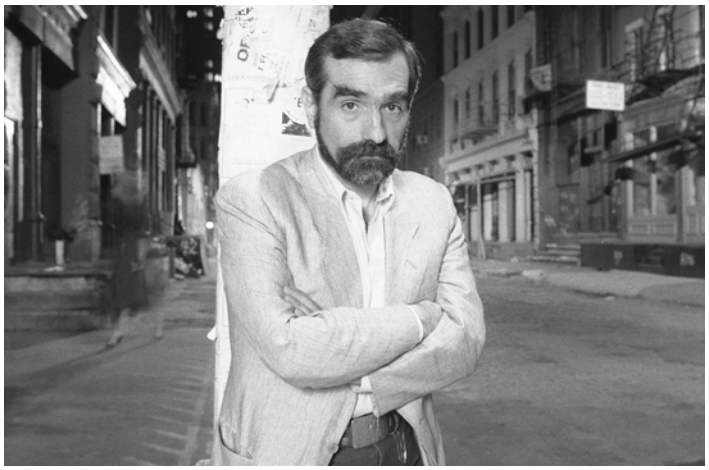
Martin Scorsese was born November 17, 1942, the younger son of Charles and Catherine (Cappa) Scorsese, Sicilian-Americans who both worked in the New York garment district. He was born in the New York borough of Queens, but his parents were from Little Italy on Manhattan's Lower East Side and the family returned there when the boy was eight. A chronic asthmatic, Scorsese was at first a lonely outsider in that macho neighborhood. He found in the movies a sense of excitement and adventure denied to him in reality. "My father used to take me to see all sorts of films," he says. "From, three, four, five years old, I was watching film after film. A complete range."

In this way Scorsese became a juvenile expert on the Hollywood movies of the 1940s and 1950s, memorizing their dates, stars, and directors. His parents could not buy him a movie camera, and Scorsese's first films were drawn scene by scene on paper—epics, horror films, "three-dimensional Westerns with cutout guns emerging from the screen." In their book *The Movie Brats*, Michael Pye and Linda Myles call him "the perfect child of Hollywood" and discuss him as a member of the "tribe" of young directors–all of them nourished on the movies–who have "taken over Hollywood" since World War II. The other "movie brats" are Francis Ford Coppola, George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, John Milius, and Brian DePalma, and Scorsese has connections with all of them through work or friendship or both.

In Little Italy, Scorsese says, "there were two kinds of people who commended respect, apart from parents. There were the mini-godfathers, who controlled the neighborhood, and the priests." Scorsese wanted to be "an ordinary parish priest," though he always had a sense of "not being worthy enough." He attended a Catholic grade school and at fourteen entered an uptown junior seminary. His grades were good but he "couldn't fit in the institution of the Church" and was thrown out, transferring to the Cardinal Hayes High School in the Bronx. It was during that period that rock 'n' roll arrived–for him, as for so many others, "a real revolution."

Having failed to gain admission to Fordham College's divinity program, Scorsese went to New York University instead, beginning as an English major but soon switching to the film department. He was taught that Hollywood movies were junk and that the films he should admire were European. Then Andrew Sarris popularized the *auteur* theory developed by André Bazin and the French New Wave, and Scorsese learned that "you didn't have to reject totally the films you liked as a child." He discovered the New Wave at the same time that he rediscovered Hollywood, and the first movie he made at NYU, a comedy short called *What's a Nice Girl Like You Doing in a Place Luke This?,* is, among other things, a homage to Truffaut. It won some student awards, as did *It's Not Just You, Murray* (1964), a fifteen-minute, tongue-in-cheek biography of a minor gangster. Drawing on Scorsese's knowledge of life in Little Italy, where it was filmed, it is very much in the documentary mode favored at NYU and can be seen now as a preliminary reconnaissance of the material of *Mean Streets*.

In 1963, meanwhile, Scorsese had become as assistant instructor at NYU, which gave him his BS in film in 1964, his MA in 1966. He is said to have been an erratic teacher, shy and nervous most of the time, but liable to take off on manic monologues so funny that "people would come in off the corridors to listen." At this time he was in close touch with the New York school of experimental filmmakers–especially John Cassavetes and the new disciples of the *cinema-vérité* documentary (like the Maysles brothers for whom he worked as a lighting man). In 1966 he left the university to concentrate on his first feature film, *Who's That Knocking at My Door?* Money for it was raised by its producers—Scorsese's teacher Hank Mangoogian and a movie enthusiast named Joseph Weil—by Scorsese himself, and by his father. The picture was made on location in New York for about$35,000, and its choppy continuity reflects the fact that it was shot in fits and starts, whenever the crew could be got together, and in a mix 16mm and 35mm.



Who's That Knocking is a full-length treatment of the autobiographical material of *It's Not Just, You, Murray*. It explores the dilemma of J.R., a young Italian-American Catholic, conditioned to believe that a woman must be either a madonna or a whore, who falls in love with an educated girl who is neither. He won't make love to her out of respect for her purity, then is outraged to discover that she has already lost her virginity. (That she lost it to a rapist is almost irrelevant to him.) The picture achieved a showing at the 1967 Chicago Film Festival but with its rough quality and unorthodox technique found no distributor at that time.

Discouraged, Scorsese went to Amsterdam where filming was cheap. He directed some "strange sorts of commercials," wrote "tough dialogue" for *Obsessione*, the American version of a Dutch thriller by Pim de la Parra. With the sponsorship of Jacques Ledoux's Belgium Cinématheque he also made *The Big Shave* (1967), a horrifying six-minute allegory about American self-destructiveness in which a man in a clinically white bathroom shaves away his own face before cutting his throat. Returning to the US, he did a variety of editing chores and in 1968 was hired to direct a feature called *The Honeymoon Killers*. Scorsese completed pre-production work but was replaced by another director a week after shooting began, apparently because his camerawork was too ambitious for the producers. He went back to NYU as an instructor (1968-1970) and there made *Street Scenes*, a documentary record of a New York antiwar demonstration. Some of his students were beaten up by counter-demonstrators and sixteen thousand dollars' worth of equipment was wrecked. Scorsese was told that he had to salvage the film or he'd lose his job. He "edited all night for ten days without a break," and in the end had so honestly exposed the impotence of the demonstrators, that, he says "they hated it….I was pretty bitter."

After all these disappointments and frustrations, Scorsese's career began to pick up in 1969, when he worked as assistant director and supervising editor on the famous rock documentary *Woodstock*, directed by his friend Mike Wadleigh (his cameraman on *Who's That Knocking?*). At around the same time, the sexploitation producer Joseph Brenner offered to buy Scorsese's still unscreened first feature film if he would introduce a nude scene. The required scene was shot in Amsterdam and the picture, originally called *Bring on the Dancing Girls*, then *I Call First*, was finally released in New York as *Who's That Knocking at My Door?* (1969) and in Los Angeles as *J.R.* (1970). Loose and improvisational in structure, it shows the influence of both Cassavetes and the New Wave in its *cinema-vérité* realism and nervous, pyrotechnic, endlessly inventive camerawork. There were complaints about the totally irrelevant sex scene and mixed feelings about Harvey Keitel's performance as J.R., but the critic who dismissed the film as "sophomoric" was distinctly of the minority. Most reviewers liked and admired it for the realism of its settings and characterizations, its buoyancy and energy. There are those who still consider it Scorsese's best feature film.

Who's That Knocking Impressed Roger Corman and, after editing and helping to produce another rock documentary, Scorsese was hired by Corman to direct his first commercial feature, *Boxcar Bertha.* It was designed to please the same large audience that had relished Corman's own gangster movie, *Bloody Mama*, but has its redeeming features. Set in the Depression, it tells the more or less true story of a vagrant girl (Barbara Hershey) who becomes the lover and accomplice of a heroic train robber (David Carradine)—a labor leader who teals from the bosses to feed his union's funds, and who is eventually crucified on a boxcar by hired thugs. Made very cheaply and filmed on location in Arkansas in twenty-four days, it contains a generous ration of the sex and violence demanded by Corman, but makes its political points simply and vividly and conveys an "authentic sense of faces and locations."

Scorsese could have done more work for Corman but was persuaded by John Cassavetes to spend no more time on other people's projects. Instead he made the film that established his reputation, *Mean Streets* (1973). Set in Little Italy (but filmed mostly in Los Angeles), it is based on a script Scorsese had begun at NYU with a fellow student named Mardik Martin. The director has made it clear that there is a lot of himself in the central character, Charlie (played by Harvey Keitel). Charlie works as a debt-collector for his uncle, a "mini-godfather." He is ambitious for worldly success, but spiritually ambitious as well, inflicting small burns on his fingers to remind himself of hell-fire. There is a similar element of expiation in his self-punishing loyalty to his violent and unstable friend Johnny Boy. Striving to be all things to all men, Charlie in the end fails everyone. He is to some extent responsible for the final explosion of violence that leaves Johnny Boy and Charlie's girlfriend hurt and perhaps dying: "You don't pay for your sins in church, but in the streets." Catherine Scorsese, who had appeared as J.R.'s mother in *Who's That Knocking,* has a small part in *Mean Streets* also, and Scorsese himself plays the killer hired to murder Johnny Boy.

According to Michael Pye and Lynda Myles, Scorsese's use of color in *Mean Streets* owes much to the British director Michael Powell, one of his idols, while the camerawork reflects the influence of Sam Fuller: "In *Mean Streets* the hand-held camera seems to join in a pool hall fight as a participant. When Johnny Boy…enters the club there are long tracking shots of great emotional power, where the meaning is never spelled out but derives from the movement of the camera as much as from what is staged….Scorsese uses the whole language of film to exorcise his past." The frenzied pace of the picture, its episodic structure and passages of improvisation, the cacophonous rock music of the soundtrack– these qualities distressed some reviewers, who called the film amateurish or pretentious or complained that it resembled "a class in social anthropology." Far more critics share the view of Pauline Kael, who thought it "a true original of our period, a triumph of personal filmmaking," with "its own hallucinatory look… its own unsettling, episodic rhythm and a highly charged emotional range that is dizzyingly sensual." Robert DeNiro's performance as Johnny Boy was greeted at the New York Film Festival as a "revelation."

About this time the actress Ellen Burstyn was looking for a director for *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, a script by Robert Getchell in which she owned an interest. Francis Ford Coppola suggested Scorsese, who accepted because he was intrigued. The film centered on a woman, and women had been mostly disposable commodities in his earlier films. Also he wanted to "explore elements of the Douglas Sirk and that whole early 1950s period." (And indeed *Alice* opens on credits written across satin, as in a Sirk "women's picture" and then goes on to echo the opening of *The Wizard of Oz*.) Alice, who had once dreamed of singing "as good as Alice Faye" but had been submerged instead in a marriage to a boorish truck driver, is suddenly widowed. She sets off from New Mexico with her brattish twelve-year-old son to make a career for herself in California. Along the way

she does actually land a job as a singer, but that ends when the psychotic with whom she is having an affair smashes his way into her motel room—a brilliantly realized scene of terrifying violence. In Tucson Alice finds work as a waitress—not what she had dreamed of, but a source of independence and real friendship. And in the end she settles down with a better man (Kris Kristofferson) than the one she has lost.

Many critics objected to the film's ending as a copout—"just another Technicolor advertisement for cotton candy romance," even though it was "dressed up to look modern." Others pointed out that Scorsese had at least managed to make a major commercial picture whose central character was a woman—no inconsiderable achievement at that time— and one that was humane, touching, and funny. Ellen Burstyn's bravura performance brought her an Oscar and the picture was a solid box-office hit, Scorsese's first. While he was completing it, he made *Italianamerican*, an affectionate documentary portrait of his parents that received a standing ovation at the 1974 New York Film Festival.

No one called *Taxi Driver* a cop-out. It is a feverish case-study of another of Scorsese's would-be saints—"one who is going to help people so much he's going to kill them." The script was written by Paul Schrader out of his own "onetime history of personal violence," his obsessive religious guilt, and a profound admiration for Bresson. Travis Bickle (Robert DeNiro) is an ex-Marine, a Midwesterner in New York, disoriented, sexually repressed, and an insomniac. He gets a job driving a cab through this city of dreadful night, which both repels and guiltily excites him. His brief romance with a cool blonde (Cybill Shepherd) ends when he expects her to share his simple taste for and, seemingly, his disgust with porno movies. Nor does he succeed in persuading the twelve-year-old hooker Iris (Jodie Foster) to go back home to her folks. Travis gives himself up to revenge, ritually disciplining and arming himself for battle like a medieval knight. There follows a sustained, appalling, frenzied orgasm of violence when he bursts into the apartment where Iris works and shoots to death her pimp and all his criminal associates. Iris goes home (where she is miserable) and Travis, purged and at least temporarily calmed, is hailed as a hero.

David Sierritt called *Taxi Driver* "the nastiest masterpiece in years," and some reviewers found it a glorification of violence, a view angrily rejected by the director. It seemed to Pauline Kael that this was "a movie in heat, a raw, tabloid version of *Notes From the Underground*….The fact that we experience Travis' need for an explosion viscerally, and that the explosion itself has the quality of a consummation, makes *Taxi Driver* one of the few truly modern horror films….But to acknowledge that when a psychopath's blood boils over he may cool down is not the same as justifying the explosion." Kael thought that "no other film has ever dramatized urban indifference so powerfully," and most critics shared her admiration for Scorsese's direction and DeNiro's deeply felt performance as a "man burning in misery." The film won the Golden Palm as best film at the 1976 Cannes Film Festival.

New York, New York is a big-budget showbiz musical, though not such an extreme departure for Scorsese as this might suggest. It tells the story of saxophone player Jimmy Doyle (Robert DeNiro) and singer Francine Evans (Liza Minelli) who meet on V-J Day in New York and fall in love, and marry. Jimmy takes over a big band in which Francine stars. She is more successful than the band and goes to Hollywood. The two meet again years later but find their moment has passed. Music has played an important part in all of Scorsese's films and he intended *New York, New York* as an affectionate pastiche of the musicals he had loved in the late 1940s and early 1950s. During the filming, however, he found himself more interested in the relationship between the two principals than in the big production numbers. Through long sessions of improvisation the story was rewritten into what Scorsese in the end called "his most personal film."

The result disappointed audiences who had hoped for a happy ending and critics who were puzzled by the film's nostalgic aspects. It had cost nearly nine million dollars and barely paid its way at the box office. The picture nevertheless had its devoted admirers, like Lynda Myles and Michael Pye, who have called it "the ultimate expression of the movie brats' philosophy…perhaps the most extraordinary of all the films that Hollywood's children have made within the studio machine….It remained personal in all its substance, an elegant use of conventions that manages to explode every one of them by sheer force of feeling…one of the most literate and moving films of our times."

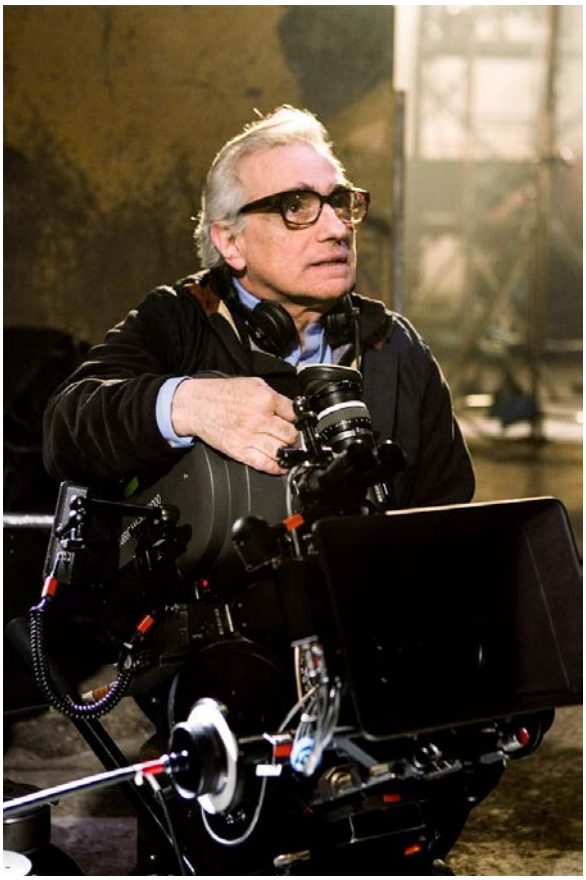
After *New York, New York* Scorsese directed Liza Minelli in a stage show—a spinoff from the film, called simply *The Act*. Meanwhile he completed a notable documentary, *The Last Waltz*. The first 35mm rock movie, it is an account of the last concert given by The Band, and was described in Rolling Stone as "nearly perfect" in its coverage.

Scorsese's next film, *Raging Bull* (1980) was the director's tour de force. Based on the autobiographical book by former middleweight boxing champion Jake La Motta, the movie was written by Martin Mardik (who had worked n the screenplay of *Mean Streets*) and Paul Schrader. Continuing their long-time collaboration, Scorsese cast Robert De Niro as La Motta, a role he prepared for for over a year, working out with La Motta every day in the Gramercy Gym on East 14th Street, and ballooning his weight from one hundred forty-five pounds to two hundred fifteen so that he could play the boxer in his later years. De Niro was honored with an Academy Award for Best Actor and Vincent Canby voiced the consensual view of critics when he called his portrayal of La Motta "the performance of his career."

Raging Bull follows La Motta from his earliest attempts to secure a title bout in 1941 through his suspension from the ring for throwing a fight, his winning the middleweight crown in 1949, defeat by Sugar Ray Robinson, and subsequent dwindling career as a coarse nightclub performer. In effect, the film is a descent into hell, with an intimation of redemption at the end. Reviewers commented on the film's intense physical and emotional brutality—an unsparing portrayal of La Motta's compulsion to deal out and invite severe punishment in the ring and to destroy his relations with those closest to him, particularly his gorgeous young wife, Vicki, whom he imagined to be unfaithful. Many critics admired the film for its absorbing depiction of a protagonist who was not sympathetic. The movie, Philip French remarked, "touches upon ignoble areas of experience we try to avoid—self-pity, willful destructiveness, the humanly repulsive….The result is a remarkable film, a beautifully crafted work that some will find enigmatic and unyielding." Canby called *Raging Bull* Scorsese's "most ambitious film as well as his finest," and Stanley Kauffmann observed that Scorsese had at last purges his work "of heavy symbolism, of film-school display, of false portent. His directing is imaginative but controlled, egregious mannerisms have coalesced and evolved into a strong style." Other critics, however, found fault with the film's moral dialectic of suffering and redemption. It seemed to Pauline Kael that cogent motivation for the fury within La Motta was missing, and that Scorsese had projected his "unmediated obsessions" on the screen without insights "disciplined by observation and narration."

The King of Comedy (1983), also starring De Niro, was a darkly humored work about a talentless nebbish obsessed with the idea of becoming a revered Johnny Carson-like comedian and TV talk show host. It was generally felt that De Niro created the antihero Rupert Pupkin with an unsettling precision, and Jerry Lewis, as Jerry Langford, the TV celebrity Pupkin doggedly pursues, hoping for a guest appearance on his show, was highly praised as well. Richard Schickel called Lewis' Langford "a shrewdly disciplined performance, he has been around, and he knows exactly how to play a star. As Langford, he mimes warmth perfectly until you notice the deadness

in his eyes, betraying the veteran public figure's inability to perceive any reality…outside his own ego." Langford and Pupkin might be aid to stand for success and failure in America, but in either case Scorsese stresses emptiness and a kind of manic despair. Derek Malcolm considered *The King of Comedy* unquestionably one of the year's notable films, and it was also highly praised by Canby. Other critics, though, like David Denby, found the movie "too bitter, too angry to make anyone laugh….It is a clever, sometimes brilliant movie, but ice-cold and not really likable." The film's absurdly happy ending called to mind the heavy-handed irony of *Taxi Driver*.



After making *The King of Comedy,* Scorsese worked for a year and a half preparing a new film, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, based on a novel by Nikos Kazantzakis. A few months before filming was to begin in Israel, however, Paramount canceled the project, after having been deluged with mail protesting the making of the movie, which according to rumors, would portray Christ as a sensualist. The film he *did* make, *After Hours* (1985), about a man alone in an alien, hostile culture, has been said by Scorsese to be a reaction against my year and a half in Hollywood trying to get *The Last Temptation of Christ* made." The script for *After Hours* was written as an assignment of the Columbia University Film School by a young student, Joseph Minion, and the film was made on a shoestring budget of three and a half million.

In the leading role, Griffin Dunne, who was also the movie's coproducer, plays Paul, a moderately successful yuppie, a computer programmer who lives alone on the Upper East Side. In a coffee shop one night he encounters a downtown siren, a lovely but neurotic young woman (Rosanna Arquette) whom he later telephones and arranges to visit at her Soho loft. From that point on Paul's life is a nightmare. Among other disasters, he is chased as a burglar, nearly lynched by a local vigilante squad, and assaulted in a hard-core punk club. Richard Schickel described *After Hours* as "a post-modern Ulysses in Nighttown," and Philip Horne called it a black comedy, "fiercely and disturbingly surreal in its lurid detail." Reviews were mixed but *After Hours* has aged well, becoming popular on the revival circuit, partly because it offers truly diverting entertainment, partly because it is irradiated by the fun Scorsese says he had in making this small film. Considered "technically superb" and "vigorously unsettling," it was thought by some to be ultimately unsatisfying. David Denby complained that "the plot has no motor, and Scorsese can keep things going only by increasing the craziness of whatever happens to Paul….[its] single joke of disorientation [is] repeated over and over."

The Color of Money (1986) was more successful, both with critics and at the box office. With a script by the novelist Richard Price, it was based on Walter Tevis' novel, a sequel to his earlier work *The Hustler*, filmed by Robert Rossen in 1961 with Paul Newman as the young pool shark. In *The Color of Money* Fast Eddie Felson is again played by Newman, now a middle-aged liquor salesman in Chicago. As the film opens, he is seized with the inspiration to adopt a flashy, gifted young pool player. Tom Cruise, who loves the game itself, purely for its sport, as his protégé. He somewhat cynically proposes to teach him the tricks of the trade and to make him a big-time champion, the winner of the Atlantic City tournament. Later in the film, however, Felson undergoes a transformation, rediscovering his own love for the purity of the game, reclaiming his talent, and achieving a measure of redemption.

David Ansen called *The Color of Money* "a dark, biting deeply human movie, both wickedly funny about human nature and uncommonly astute in its depiction of a world of incessant mind games…and psychological hustling….From the first splendid

scene…you know exactly what [Scorsese and his cast] are after and have the craft to sharpen…until it glistens." Stanley Kauffmann also praised the polish of Scorsese's technique. "every strategy is used," he wrote, "to make the cramped pool tables and the dingy pool halls yield visual richness…theater lighting that takes the prosaic places out of realism into 'real' abstractions, varied angles of pool shots and players, varied rhythms within sequences, and especially, immense close-ups of billiard balls that render them talismanic." But many critics found the film's story weak, with blurred lines of character development and an unlikely ending. Fast Eddie's "redemption"—despite Newman's Oscar-nominated performance—was thought to be contrived.

The director is a short, wiry, neat, bearded man who speaks "in a rapid and staccato city dialect that suggests jump cuts and flashing images." He is a compulsive worker, and demonstrated his urgent nervous energy in *Taxi Driver*, burning "a small hole in the screen" during his brief appearance as the most rancid of Travis' fares. He contributed a similar performance to Bertrand Tavernier's *Round Midnight*….

According to Derek Malcolm, "someone once suggested that he makes movies as though his life depended on it. The truth is that it probably does."

Martin Scorsese's 'The King of Comedy' is a developed critique and a statement that is just as precise and contemporary as it was back in 82" (*Cinephilia & Beyond)*

Martin Scorsese's *The King of Comedy* easily stands as one of the more unusual of the director's films, but at the same time it's comprised of the same amount of brilliance and talent that Scorsese wove into his other, more celebrated movies. We're talking about a black comedy that hardly delivers any laughs. A comedy that isn't funny because it portrays the hilarious albeit sad constituent of our everyday lives, something we don't find funny because we're a part of it, because we give our best to help the carousel continue spinning. That's why *The King of Comedy* hit a little too close to home to be universally admired at the time of its release. In its portrayal of celebrity worship and the American media culture, it's honest, sharp and cuts deep, hurting the viewer, forcing him to think, offering the truth about society and the media bluntly, directly, without any euphemism or regard. This was hardly an easy film to make: thanks to a looming strike of the Writers Guild of America, the crew was under a lot of pressure to wrap the project up with the assistance of a smaller film company. They also had to shoot entirely on location in New York. Scorsese was allegedly hesitant to go on with the project at a critical time like this, but De Niro was keen on shooting a comedy, film critic turned screenwriter Paul D. Zimmerman's text was promising, and in the end the risky move paid off. With the help of sparkling performances from De Niro, Jerry Lewis, Sandra Bernhard and Diahnne Abbott, Scorsese made a distressing film full of angry, bitter people with agonizing aspirations, a developed critique and a statement that is just as precise and contemporary as it was back in '82, when the audiences weren't all that enthusiastic because they couldn't deal with the film's implications. According to De Niro, *The King of Comedy*, written by Newsweek scribe Paul Zimmerman, was a project he'd been wanting to do since the days of Travis Bickle. "Marty and I were in Cannes with *Taxi Driver*, and I was shooting *1900*," he said. "I was trying to convince Marty to do it, and he finally did." It took "from 1975 or so to 1980," admitted Scorsese. "I read it, but I didn't quite get it. As we got further into the work, I understood it. I discovered it as we went along." "It was coming at the end of period of filmmaking in L.A. that sort of ended," the director continued. *"Raging Bull* [was released] ten days before *Heavens Gate*, the studio went down, and that kind of filmmaking went out. This film was one of the last vestiges of that type of picture. It just snuck in under the radar. The whole world had changed." Asked the moderator, "What was it like doing a comedy?" "I don't know whether it's a comedy or what," said De Niro. Said Scorsese, "It wasn't a comedy, was it?"

(This *Cinephilia & Beyond* entry includes Paul D. Zimmerman's screenplay and videos of Scorsese on growing up in Manhattan and his filmmaking career, Jerry Lewis on his career)

Jason Bailey: "How Scorsese's 'King of Comedy' Influenced a Generation of Film, Television, and Stand-Up (*Flavorwire*)

Roger Ebert's original review of *The King of Comedy* is a useful tool for understanding exactly how indifferently Martin Scorsese's comedy/drama was received upon its release – coming as it does from one of the director's earliest and loudest boosters, and even *he* can't figure out what to make of it. Calling it "one of the most arid, painful, wounded movies I've ever seen," Ebert describes the film as "an agonizing portrait of lonely, angry people with their emotions all tightly bottled up. This is a movie that seems ready to explode — but somehow it never does." And this was one of the *kinder* notices; Pauline Kael insisted, "It's so – deliberately – quiet and empty that it doesn't provide even the dumb, mind-rotting diversion that can half amuse audiences at ordinary bad movies." And yet, like antihero Rupert Pupkin in a waiting room, *The King of Comedy* refuses to go away. A box office failure in 1983, it's since been pinpointed as a key influence by scores of modern comedians. Its anti-comic style is all over today's alt-comedy landscape. And with a new restoration and re-release…, it's worth asking why the film was received so coldly then, and why it's embraced so warmly now.

If you've not seen it – and seriously, correct that post haste – here's the movie in a nutshell: Rupert Pupkin (Robert De Niro) is a social misfit who fancies himself a stand-up comic, though he has no professional accomplishments or even performance experience. That'll all change, he's certain, if he can just secure a spot on the nightly talk show of Jerry Langford (Jerry Lewis), a Carson-esque kingmaker and personality. One night, Rupert saves Jerry from a mob of autograph-seekers and manages to work his way into his backseat, where he pitches the star directly; Jerry advises him to come by his office, go through the proper channels, etc. But Rupert is a man who hears what he wants to hear, and imagines this pro forma brush-off as the first step of a professional and personal relationship. He tries to ingratiate himself with Jerry's staff; he shows up unannounced at Jerry's country house, with high school crush Rita (Diahnne Abbott) on his arm, and is swiftly escorted from the premises. Desperate, Rupert and similarly unhinged pal Masha (Sandra Bernhard) conspire to kidnap Jerry, holding him hostage in exchange for a featured spot on the show.

The script – penned by film-critic-turned-screenwriter Paul D. Zimmerman – had been floating around for nearly a decade by the time the film hit theaters in spring of '83. Inspired by a David Susskind show on autography hunters and an *Esquire* article on a fanatical Carson follower, Zimmerman "started to think about the connections between autograph-hunters and assassins. Both stalked the famous – one with a pen and one with a gun." His script caught the attention of a post-*Godfather II* Robert De Niro, who was just beginning to experience the kind of fame found at the script's center; De Niro brought it to Scorsese, then shooting *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, who turned it down. "I didn't understand it," the director recalled. "I was too close to it."

Six years later, on the heels of their rewarding collaboration on *Raging Bull*, De Niro (who had bought the script and held onto it all those years) again put *King of Comedy* in front of Scorsese, who finally agreed to take a shot at it. The timing was fortuitous; they were towards the end of a period wherein its narrative made sense, where a single shot on a show like Carson's could make or break a break a stand-up. "Comedy was in an interesting period, because standup hadn't gotten to be this huge business," says *New York Times* comedy columnist Jason Zinoman, noting "not only was it before the real boom of clubs exploding everywhere, but there really wasn't that much stand-up on television, either."

By the time Scorsese and crew went into production the summer of 1981, two recent events veered their fictional story – of a madman driven to violence by imagined connections with celebrities – uncomfortably close to fact. One afternoon the previous December, outside his apartment building in Manhattan, John Lennon signed an autograph for a fan named Mark David Chapman; later that night, Chapman shot and killed Lennon as he returned home from a recording session. The following March, outside the Hilton Hotel in Washington D.C., John Hinkley Jr. fired six shots at President Ronald Reagan, wounding the President, his press secretary, a police officer, and a Secret Service agent. Hinkley claimed he committed the act to impress Jodie Foster, in a strange attempt to mirror the events of *Taxi Driver* – a Scorsese film, in which she co-starred with Robert De Niro. (That film, in turn, was loosely inspired by the attempted assassination of presidential candidate George Wallace in 1972.)

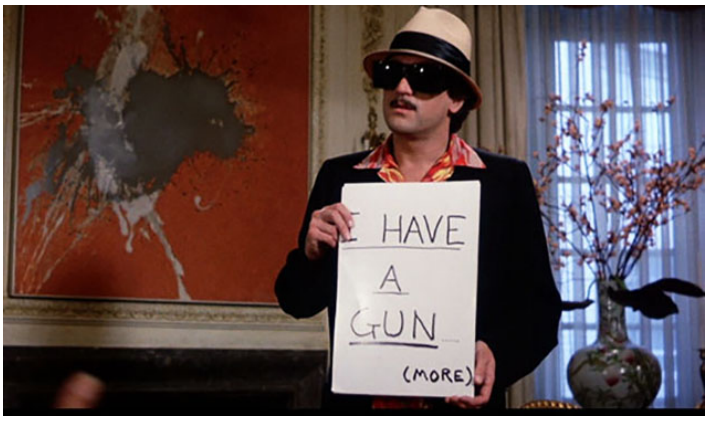
Though such events had faded slightly by the time Twentieth Century Fox released *King of Comedy* in February of 1983 (they spent nearly a year sitting on the film in light of disastrous previews; vice president of production David Field recalled, "In Kansas City we got such bad numbers, it became funny"), the comparison to *Taxi Driver* is not only apt, but instructive. Both films concerned a protagonist unable to function in social situations, in no small part because of what Scorsese called the "extraordinary violence and hostility in him"; both films find that protagonist attempting and failing to connect with a beautiful, idealized woman; both stories culminate in that character resorting to a desperate act of violence; both conclude with a (perhaps fantasized) coda in which that act results in precisely the kind of praise and fame they might've hoped for.

Yet *Taxi Driver*'s climactic shoot-out, for all its gore and ugliness, is a visceral sequence, a release valve for the tension that's accumulated for the previous two hours. *King of Comedy*, as Ebert notes, never "explodes," and thus never gives us that release. Zimmerman later pinpointed this problem: "I think people knew the movie was funny as they were watching it, but they didn't feel safe enough to laugh. When you laugh, you're defenseless, so you need a context of reassurance. *King of Comedy* had such a climate of danger that people didn't allow themselves to laugh. That confused the studio. They didn't know how to promote it."

That's an understatement. The original poster (above) situated De Niro and Lewis as caricatured "Joker" and "King" on playing cards, but its tagline warned viewers, "It's no laughing matter." Few bothered to find out; it only earned back $2.5 million of its $19 million budget. "But of *course* it flopped," wrote Tom Shone in the recent *Martin Scorsese: A Retrospective*. "How else to greet a film about flop sweat? What better debut for Rupert Pupkin than a groan in a half-empty theater?" But the film wound up in regular rotation on HBO and a brisk renter on VHS, in that mid-to-late-'80s period that was so formative for future comic writers and performers.

In terms of subject matter, *King of Comedy* was ahead of its time in its presentation of comedy in particular and show business in general as a business, a job with all the flatness of any other workplace. In earlier peeks at the comedy world, explains historian and writer Mike Sacks, there was "a magical element to it. If it's for *Your Show of Shows,* you're a young writer and you're witnessing elephants walking past you. If it's for *The Ed Sullivan Show*you're witnessing beautiful girls walking past you, jugglers, bands – but in this it was sort of like a commercial entity. It was just another day at work for these people, and you saw that in a sense it's no different than any other major cooperation." And thus, *King of Comedy*'s portrait of how a late-night talk show works – complete with celebrities playing themselves and long-time *Tonight Show* producer

Fred De Cordova as *Jerry Langford Show* producer Bert Thomas – directly influenced such groundbreaking comedies as *The Larry Sanders Show* and the various iterations of Alan Partridge, to say nothing of inside-showbiz comedies like *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, *30 Rock*, and *BoJack Horseman*. (Entertainment journalism and showbiz commentary in general also became more prevalent in the years that followed, with *Entertainment Tonight*'s 1981 debut leading the way.)



It's also important to remember how sharply opinions – particularly among the intelligentsia – have shifted about television from that period to ours. As Zinoman notes, much of the "savvy, sophisticated comedy of that time took for granted this idea that television was terrible," a lesser medium, for lesser intellects. There was something of that in Scorsese's fascinating approach to the material. Because it was set in the world of television, the filmmaker decided to shoot it like a television show, in what De Niro biographer John Baxter called "old-fashioned framing, almost square, largely empty sets furnished in primary colors, a flat lighting style," matched with edits that leaned heavily on the conventional medium-close-up/over-the-should reaction formula. The result, notes critic David Ehrenstein in his book *The Scorsese Picture*, is "a series of provocations – frontal assaults on standard moviegoer expectations."

Yet as with the best gimmicks of technique, Scorsese's bold play mirrors the frustrations of the narrative. "In *The King of Comedy*, it's all a series of frozen frames," he later explained. "The characters never penetrate each other's areas. They just can't get in."As a result, we don't get the visceral thrill of his customary technique, the juice of an exhilarating dolly shot or flashy camera move. We're locked in, just like the characters are.

That frustration goes a long way towards explaining why the film didn't play then – and why it does now. This is a daring tonal experiment for 1983, when the wall between church and state that separated comedy and drama was so strictly adhered to. "As far as the sensibility of comedy, I think in retrospect *King of Comedy* was hugely influential, but it was so bizarre," Sacks says. The tone it establishes is challenging, because there are funny scenes and situations which could easily be played for laughs, but that black cloud of tension and danger hangs over all of them, and Scorsese won't give you that release. It's a comedy that doesn't care about getting laughs – a much more common notion now than then.

Which is not to say that anti-comedy, or at the very least deconstructive comedy, was unheard of. Steve Martin had the biggest stand-up act in the land, as Zinoman points out, and his act "was doing a parody of a showbiz act. So his stuff, Martin Mull's stuff, Albert Brooks's early videos for SNL and albums were really deconstructing comedy. And Andy Kaufman, too. So you have the roots of this idea of like, satirizing and deconstructing talk shows, which Letterman really brought into your living room every night on TV." *Late Night with David Letterman* premiered on February 1, 1982, when *King of Comedy* was in post-production, but Scorsese had been a fan of Letterman's earlier morning show, Zinoman says, "so Letterman was on his mind when he was making *The King Of Comedy*." When the film was released, Letterman returned the favor by having Scorsese and Zimmerman on as guests, as well as Sandra Bernhard, whose "whole relationship with Letterman, in a weird way, was born out of *King Of Comedy*," Zinoman says.

"Her role in that it was the most punk unhinged role that I had ever seen up until that point, even to this day," Sacks agrees. "It was almost like she didn't even know the camera was on her and she was totally untethered from reality." That holds especially true in her scenes alone with Jerry, while Rupert is off doing the show; with the object of her desired taped down to a chair, her live-wire energy, dish-smashing physicality, and bonkers improvisations (this is all guesswork, but seriously, who could've written a line like "Put on some Shirelles, I just wanna be black, I wish I was Tina Turner") are both funny and dangerous.

The kind of off-center comedy that *King of Comedy* traffics in, and in many ways cleared the way for, is often dubbed "Comedy of Awkwardness," but

here and in the best of that material, there's more to it than that – there's embarrassment, anxiety, desperation. In Sacks's book *And Here's the Kicker*, Stephen Merchant pinpoints it as a key influence on his most famous co-creation: "Both Ricky [Gervais] and I wanted dead time for *The Office* and we didn't want to have too many laughs. *The King of Comedy* is a good example of that. It has weird, jarring tones. We liked those tones. Any episode of *The Office*could potentially end on a sorrowful note, or it could end on a melancholic one. It was just what it was. It didn't have to have the sitcom beats."

Today, Sacks sees its anti-comedy influence in "everything. Whether it's Tim and Eric, whether it's Adult Swim, whether it's videos for College Humor, the Galifianakis TV show, it's all over. The humor in discomfort I think is extremely common. You would find it with Andy Kaufman in the '70s but to have a character like Rupert Pupkin as a lead character, one that you associate with, who is not only is a horrible person but a horrible comic. I think that's just astonishing."

"I haven't seen it since I made it," Scorsese told Richard Schickel a few years ago. "It's too embarrassing." But maybe he is, as he felt when he first read that script all the way back in 1974, "too close to it." In 2008, Roger Ebert revisited the film, to write a "reconsideration" for his book *Scorsese by Ebert*, and remained frustrated: "I cannot give myself to it. It has no emotional point of entry. All of the characters are closed doors." That analysis is probably accurate. What no one – not Ebert, not Scorsese, not Zinneman – could've predicted was how much of contemporary comedy was rooted in the notion of keeping those doors shut tight.

Melissa Anderson: "Sandra Bernhard Still Rules in Scorsese's 'King of Comedy'" (*Village Voice*)

Rupert Pupkin, the talentless self-aggrandizer played by Robert De Niro in Martin Scorsese's mordant satire *The King of Comedy* (1982), descends from the same diseased bloodline as *Taxi Driver*'s Travis Bickle. His name as ridiculous as his polyester suits and Magic Marker mustache, Rupert is a pathetic stand-up hopeful who's outraged that his TV-host idol, Jerry Langford (Jerry Lewis), fails to recognize his comic genius. His pique and desire for instant fame presage our era of Vine celebrityhood, a condition diagnosed perfectly by quick-witted raconteuse Fran Lebowitz, the subject of Scorsese's great 2010 documentary *Public Speaking*: "There's too much democracy in the culture, not enough democracy in society." Or, as aggrieved Rupert himself puts it, "Why not me? Why not?"

The King of Comedy...brilliantly keeps viewers unmoored, the result of its consistently off-kilter tone. Though filled with sight gags and corny jokes, the movie is also darkened by genuine menace, as Rupert, aided by fellow unhinged Jerry Langford superfan Masha (Sandra Bernhard), becomes ever more desperate to get the icon's attention. But the most generative tension in the film emerges from the clash of performance styles — and from the incongruous jolt, still potent all these decades later, of watching a 55-year-old Lewis, that longtime avatar of extremely regressed imbecility, in his first serious role.

Lewis's character is based on Johnny Carson, whom Scorsese first approached about playing Langford, an offer the late-night emperor quickly declined. But Lewis, born less than a year after Carson, makes for an excellent analogue of the *Tonight Show* host. Both Lewis and Langford are archetypes of Greatest Generation entertainers, old-guard pros who at the time were still beloved by all age brackets. The era-spanning adulation is best demonstrated during Langford's clipped saunter — a Rat Pack–style gait that Lewis gilds with just a touch more peacockery — from his Midtown East high-rise to his Paramount Plaza office. "Hey, Jerry!" a group of construction workers yell out from several stories above, their salute directed not only to Langford but also to the legend portraying him.

The straightforward approach to show business embodied by Lewis/Langford fascinatingly contrasts with De Niro's Method intensity as Rupert. The younger performer, among the most emblematic of New Hollywood actors, brought *The King of Comedy*'s script, written by former *Newsweek* film critic Paul D. Zimmerman, to Scorsese in 1974. Production, however, didn't begin until the late spring of 1981, just a few months after De Niro won a Best Actor Oscar for the Jake LaMotta biopic *Raging Bull*, his previous project with the director — and the one that features the star, who packed on seventy pounds for the film's opening and closing scenes, revealing just how far he would go in his fanatical immersion in a part. Though Rupert Pupkin is a more benign sociopath than either Travis Bickle or Jake LaMotta, De Niro's commitment to the character is no less zealous. He plays the loser — a 34-year-old messenger still living at home with Mom, practicing his pitiful routine in the basement across from a cardboard cutout of Liza Minnelli — as a man whose titanic self-regard is impervious to those who make absolutely clear to Rupert how quickly they wish to be rid of him.

And yet, with all due respect to these three kings — Jerry and Bobby as overseen by Marty — it is Sandra Bernhard, the countess of comedy, here in her first major screen role, whose spectacular derangement as the moneyed Masha gives the satire its most outré quality. We first spot the rabid stalker in the opening minutes, distinguishing herself with her banshee-like ferocity among the scrum of Langford votaries who mob him after a show. Her unruly auburn curls are nearly weaponized, and her outrageously wide, ever-yammering mouth suggests the enormity of her appetite for the middle-aged talk show luminary. Masha makes her way into Langford's limo and pounces on him, her frenzied entrance forcing her idol out of the car. Her hands are pressed against the backseat window, an image of desperation that Scorsese freezes as Ray Charles's "Come Rain or Come Shine" plays over the credits — a song that Masha will reprise in an a cappella version, crooning to Langford while he's tied up, his mouth sealed with duct tape, in her tony Upper East Side maisonette.

Like most of the actress's scenes in the film, these moments were largely improvised. They illuminate what would become the two key aspects of Bernhard's own one-woman shows, performances that pivot on her lacerating dissections of popular culture: her florid verbal aggression and her brilliant tweaking of the boundaries between insider and outsider, narcissism and abjection. Shortly after *The King of Comedy*'s release, Bernhard made the first of several appearances on David Letterman's show, simultaneously terrifying and turning on the then-ascendant late-night mainstay, a supposedly hipper heir to the Carsons and Langfords of the world. Wholly unpredictable on Letterman's set, she dazzled, as Guy Trebay wrote in an appreciation in *Artforum* in 1998, as "one of the shrewdest and least assimilable of cultural exegetes," becoming "most famous as that character who sticks in America's craw." Masha certainly rankles Langford in *The King of Comedy*, an unsparing look at desperation and entitlement that still leaves a bruise. Bernhard, in a 2013 interview with *Movieline*, uncannily echoes some of the language Trebay used to describe her when she assesses the brutal power of Scorsese's film: "It's made of earth and mud and shit — stuff that sticks to you."

Gabriel Urbina: "Director B-Side: Martin Scorsese and 'The King of Comedy'" (mxdwn.com)

The great underlying joke of *The King of Comedy* is that it's a film about people who are desperate to be famous – people who would do *anything* for their fifteen minutes in the limelight – made by people who had just achieved fame and success beyond their wildest dreams and didn't seem sure what to do with it. It's a tension that lives at the very heart of the film, and it extends outwards to all of its aspects. *The King of Comedy* is built on contradictions and subversions, and it's designed to exist in almost direct opposition of everything the director had made up to that point. The result is one of Martin Scorsese's most unsettling and difficult films – but also, and perhaps because of those things, one of

his most rewarding and most representative of his concerns as an artist.

The King of Comedy is the story of Rupert Pupkin, a schlubby aspiring comic and fame seeker in New York City played by Robert DeNiro. He is ambitious and hard-working, but, alas, not particularly funny or talented. In a stunning display of wide-eyed oblivion, or perhaps desperate, willful denial, he soldiers on in his pursuit of a career as a funnyman. He's convinced that his big break will come about by getting featured on *The Jerry Langford Show* (a satirical stand-in for *The Tonight Show*). Ever a master of human psychology, Rupert decides that his ticket to fame is to force his way into Langford's (Jerry Lewis) life and become friends with the TV personality. But when this cunning plan inevitably falls through, Rupert hatches a darker scheme: kidnap Langford and, as a ransom, demand that he be allowed to do the opening monologue on that night's episode of *The Jerry Langford Show*.

It's hard to imagine such a thing as a Filmmaker's B-Side for someone like Martin Scorsese. Over the past three decades, he's emerged as such a versatile and flexible filmmaker that it's a bit hard to conceive of there being something that's beyond the grasp of his toolbox. Politically charged biopic of a modern religious leader? No problem. Restrained, conversational documentary about a larger-than-life personality? He's got you covered. Adventurous children's film? Make that "Academy Award-winning adventurous children's film," thank you very much. But the landscape was much more limited back in 1983, when *King of Comedy* was made. Scorsese had roared unto the scene with *Mean Streets* and *Taxi Driver*, and had just poured all of his personal and artistic energies ("kamikaze filmmaking," he called it) into the hurricane of *Raging Bull*. His films were unified by a preoccupation with male self-destructiveness, psychotic obsession, and overriding violence. Even a detour like 1977's *New York, New York*, nominally a throwback to the Golden Era musicals of MGM, plays more like an emotionally unstable dissertation about how war and modern horrors have inflicted too much upon us for those kinds of carefree stories to really reach us. Scorsese's star had reached an early peak, but his filmography was much more rigidly contained than the one we currently know. A small, neurotic show-business drama… comedy… drama (more on that in a second) seemed more in the wheelhouse of Woody Allen than Martin Scorsese.

Part of that definitely comes from his continued work with his volcanic leading man. *The King of Comedy*was the fifth collaboration between Scorsese and Robert DeNiro. The latter had just culminated a decade of street-tough and dangerously unhinged roles with his take-no-prisoners portrayal of Jake LaMotta and its accompanying Best Leading Actor Oscar. If the choice of subject matter for the film seemed like a weird turn for Scorsese, the decision to cast DeNiro in the role of Rupert Pupkin must have seemed like a bout of madness. DeNiro's star persona was closely tied to the lines of stereotypical masculinity and violent forward momentum. The lead in *The King of Comedy* is defined, above everything else, by how pathetic he is. His stature seems to adjust throughout the movie so that everyone is a good foot taller than he is. His bad haircut and overpowering moustache are only overshadowed by the fact that he lives with his mother. He looks like the kind of man that has gotten beaten up for his lunch money every day without fail for the past 35 years.

But even beyond these superficial left turns, there's something about *The King of Comedy* that feels oddly disjointed from the rest of Scorsese's early oeuvre. Scorsese had made a name for himself on a few major stylistic tricks, perhaps most saliently his moving camera. Just a few minutes into *Taxi Driver* are enough to feel the way the camera roves through the streets of New York, not so much following the characters as stalking them. His

personal brand of expressionistic filmmaking really exploded in *Raging Bull*, a film that used slow-motion, lens distortions, optical flashes, color oversaturation, high contrast black and white, explosive montage editing, and elaborate camera choreographies to map out the landscape of a man's fragile emotional psyche. So what does he do when he comes to *The King of Comedy*? He locks his camera down, keeping it perfectly, some would say claustrophobically, still for long periods of time. Instead of his usual kineticism, the film is pervaded by a sense of static observation. If *Raging Bull* got to audiences by dragging them into the boxing ring, *The King of Comedy* is almost as abrasive in its refusal to let viewers do anything *but* watch the events unfolding in front of them.

So, just to recap: the subject matter seems like a bit of a stretch for this filmmaking team, DeNiro's gone from unstoppable force of nature to impotent fanboy dork, and Mr. Cinematic Style is toeing the line between "restrained" and "annoyingly terse." Are there any other curveballs that this film's got to throw at the audience?

Well… just one. Namely, the fact that no one seems exactly sure about whether this film's a comedy or not. It's a tricky one. Seen on a superficial level, the film seems to relish playing up scenes of extreme awkwardness or social tension, a school of comedy that has been developed in recent years by the likes of Ricky Gervais. But whether these scenes were meant to make the audience laugh uncomfortably or just plain make them uncomfortable seems to still be up in the air. While speaking at a screening of the film at the Tribeca Film Festival, DeNiro and Scorsese were asked about the experience of making a comedy. "I don't know whether it's a comedy or what," replied DeNiro.

Needless to say, audiences at the time weren't sure whether they wanted to see *The King of Comedy (*or what), and the film was a non-starter at the box office. It's debatable whether any movie could have lived up to the expectations that followed a film like *Raging Bull*, but *The King of Comedy* was definitely not the film to appease fans looking for the second coming of Jake LaMotta. Roger Ebert, in a review that epitomizes the diplomatic approach of, "I admire this but I don't like it," writes how, "I walked out of that first screening filled with dislike for the movie. Dislike, but not disinterest. Memories of "The King of Comedy" kept gnawing at me, and when people asked me what I thought about it, I said I wasn't sure." Entertainment Tonight were less acquiescing, and happily branded it the "Flop of the Year."

Still, over the years, *The King of Comedy* has acquired a healthy following, and quite a bit of respect amongst the film intelligentsia. It may simply be a matter of gaining insight into how adroit a director Scorsese can be, and how tricky. Approached with the hindsight appreciation of the filmmaker's versatility, *The King of Comedy* can emerge as a brilliant exploration of fame and celebrity. Perhaps the ultimate key to understanding the film is that it's a piece *about* comedy more than it's an actual comedy. Its concerns are with depicting the hardship, pains, and difficulties that go into making people laugh. Its aim is to depict the backbreaking labor and endless toil that go into the process without ever letting you focus on the results.

Seen through that lens, *The King of Comedy*'s odd design choices make a lot more sense. The film is limiting and claustrophobic by design, imitating the state in which the characters live. Rupert Pupkin is a man that knows no release, just the relentless will to keep powering forward, and so the film doesn't allow you to do anything other than that. Likewise, the casting of DeNiro emerges as an inspired choice. In many ways, Rupert is cut from the same delusional loner cloth as Travis Bickle, but with one major switch flipped: the violence in the character is aimed inwards rather than outward. Whereas as Travis exploded at regular intervals throughout *Taxi Driver*, Rupert coils further and further with each passing moment of the film, growing tenser, more erratic,

more nervous, more neurotic, and with his protective, rehearsed smile growing wider and more panicked.

The film's greatest asset, however, may be Jerry Lewis as Jerry Langford, the comedian god that Rupert aspires to befriend, equal, and, perhaps eventually supplant. It's easy to see Lewis as simply playing a pitch-perfect satire of Johnny Carson, and he fulfills that role perfectly within the film, but the personal baggage that he brings into the film as a performer is invaluable. Lewis was famous as the star of comedic films like *The Nutty Professor*, but he had also gained notoriety for the gap between his onscreen persona and his offscreen reality. The real Lewis was known to be surprisingly acerbic and mean, a stark contrast to the joyous persona that he carefully cultivated onscreen. *The King of Comedy* plays him pretty much as an extension of himself – a talented, charming star that Rupert can idolize… as long as he does it from a distance. Once he gets up close and gets to spend any amount of time with Langford, he finds a man who is rude, impatient, and much more contemptuous than anyone else in the film. The message seems to be that show business success will not solve Rupert's life – Jerry seems as broken as he is, if not more.

All of these elements come together to form *The King of Comedy*, an awkward, difficult, claustrophobic, and discomforting two hours of fame obsession, celebrity chasing, idol stalking, and desperate, misguided efforts to solve something inside the main characters that may just be beyond saving. And it's in that final note that *King of Comedy* suddenly doesn't seem all that dissimilar to films like *Taxi Driver* or *Raging Bull*. It's not a film that Scorsese and DeNiro could have made any earlier in their careers, but it's as eloquent about their concerns as the other ones. It's a film that recognizes the violence inherent in wanting something you can never have as well as the bitter disappointment of not being satisfied when you get everything you ever wanted, and honestly not knowing which one is worse.

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